

CONSERVATION DEPARTMENT & CONSERVATION COMMISSION
Fiscal Year 2004

Thanks to community-wide support, the Conservation Department and Conservation Commission this year were pleased to continue the Town's vital efforts in land protection, conservation area management, trails development, wetlands enforcement, energy conservation, and work on various other conservation projects together with Town farmers, landowners, and many others.

More than 2,000 acres in town are now under Agricultural Preservation Restrictions (APR's), and nearly 2,000 acres are in Town ownership as conservation land. Another 165 acres are protected by permanent Conservation Restrictions.

In June 2004, the Town and the State completed the purchase of an APR on the 157-acre Frederick and Linda Hess Farm (East Village Farm) on North East Street. Assisting in the purchase were more than 100 individual donors and two land trusts, Valley Land Fund and the Kestrel Trust. The Hess family generously sold the APR at less than its appraised value. The purchase brings nearly to completion the Town's ongoing efforts to protect the entire block of highly productive and scenic farmland along North East Street, Strong Street, Adams Brook, and Amethyst Brook.

With funding from Western Mass Electric Company, Amherst College, and Hampshire College, the Department continued its efforts to develop a Town-wide Climate Action Plan. The plan is scheduled for completion in 2005, and will detail steps to be taken by Town government, the colleges, the University of Massachusetts, the commercial sector, and private residents to reduce overall emissions of greenhouse gases. Stephanie Ciccarello and intern Amy Verel of the Conservation Department, together with a town-gown working group, have been coordinating the work.

Also this year, the Department inaugurated a new Literary Trails program, by which many trails in town, both new and established, are now named for prominent authors and poets, past and present, with strong Amherst connections. Amherst College hosted a reception to honor the literary figures so named, and trail signs are now in place for those Literary Trails. Guiding the development of the system were John Coull of the Chamber of Commerce, Tevis Kimball and Bonnie Isman of the Jones Library, Margaret Lenehan of the sponsoring PeoplesBank, UMass Professor Charles Moran, and others. Norman and Sabina Cournoyer assisted in the effort with an extremely generous contribution to the Amherst trails system.

The Department also received notice that it will be receiving a \$30,000 Recreational Trails Grant from the state Department of Conservation and Recreation. The grant proposal was prepared by the Department together with the Hitchcock Center and volunteer John Kowaleski. The grant will fund the complete rehabilitation of trails at the Larch Hill Conservation Area, home of the Hitchcock Center, and the construction of a new trail from Hitchcock east along the north bank of the Fort River to the Norwottuck Rail Trail.

Together with US Fish & Wildlife, Hampshire Bird Club, and many volunteers under the supervision of unpaid chief carpenter Miles Herter, the Department also completed the construction of the new Harvey Allen Bird Observation Blind just off the Norwottuck Rail Trail south of Station Road at the edge of the Lawrence Swamp.

The Department continued work on an upcoming two-volume History of Amherst Farms (with a working group that includes Carlton Brose, Ruth Jones, Sheila Rainford, and Alice Stanne), supervised work around town done under the state Wetlands Protection Act and the Town Wetlands Bylaw, planned for future collaborative efforts by the Hitchcock Center, the Town, Bramble Hill Farm, and the Common School, pursued the ongoing collaborative management of a beautiful ornamental tree and shrub arboretum at Applewood (together with the Applewood Garden Committee), continued its management of more than 50 conservation areas and more than 80 miles of foot trails, and continued its work with the Public Shade Tree Advisory Committee, the Farm Committee, the Cherry Hill Advisory Committee, the Friends of Puffer's Pond, the Ridgewalker Trail Committee, the Community Preservation Act Committee, and other groups and boards.

Conservation Commission members this year were Chair Francesca Maltese, Vice- Chair John Gerber, Otto Stein, Nicki Robb, Ellie Manire-Gatti, Barbara Mitchell, and Bruce Griffin. Staff included Office Manager Bridget Davis, Wetlands Administrator and Energy Coordinator Stephanie Ciccarello, Land Manager Tammy Ciesla, Assistant Land Manager David McKinnon, Cherry Hill Golf Course Manager Dan Engstrom, and many seasonal trails, pond, and golf course employees.

- Pete Westover, Conservation Director

This is Pete Westover's final report, since he is planning to retire from Town service in the next few months. The Commission is grateful for his support, as well as for his numerous and invaluable accomplishments over thirty years.